

Attn: HEDTestimony@cga.ct.gov

Subject: HB 6517

My name is Amy McCready. I reside in Danbury, CT and I strongly support HB 6517.

My son graduated H.S. last July after compensatory education was awarded.

Our family's journey began long before Dyslexia was even recognized in the state of CT. My late husband had dyslexia and was pushed through the Norwalk system until H.S. where he ended up at an alternative school named BCVA. We recognized the struggles for our boy early in his life. Because my son was diagnosed with ADHD the Bethel Public School System was providing learning assistance. However, it was apparent by first-second grade that dyslexia, dyscalculia and soon after that dysgraphia were compounding his learning struggle. I was my son's advocate. I also had a volunteer advocate from what used to be known as We Care out of Danbury. I attended every PPT. My son struggled incredibly and experienced emotional challenges stemming from his personal frustration and the eventual lack of social interaction with his peers.

Time and again I spoke with dept heads regarding methods of teaching that I had read about such as the Orton Gillingham Approach. The school apologized but said they had no teachers trained in alternative teaching methods for this kind of need. Furthermore, the state of CT does not permit for a flexible program and that I would need to perhaps seek out a private tutor if I felt my son had this form of learning disability. The CT system has no set structure of identifying nor testing for this concern. The battle raged year after year, my son continued to fail the tests that would require him to progress to the next grade but as long as we were willing to put him into summer school and we would agree that he be pulled out of "other classes" for remedial reading he would be on track and continue forward. My poor child. He began acting out, not wanting to get dressed to go to school. We were late nearly every day no matter how early we would wake up. School was his torment. And he HATED it. His middle school principal even kept my son's note on the wall of his office, a scribble, "I hate school." The principle told me he looked at it as a personal incentive to try to help every student the best he could. It was by middle school that we really began to see the trauma the lack of appropriate education was having on my son. He was frustrated, felt stupid, he was lacking in socialization skills because for years he was pulled out of classes such as music, & art. Classes that he would have found areas of expression and perhaps discovered personal talents. Classes where communication was permitted in a less structured manner. My son was always pulled out for remedial reading, remedial math. He missed out on so much science and history too. A child spends the first 6 years of his life learning to read and the remainder of his life reading to learn!

My son basically learned the minimum. He did have a wonderful reading teacher that had it not been for her to brighten his day he would never have gone to school at all. The struggle was real.

At age ten my husband passed away and by 11 or the middle of the 8th grade we were forced to move from the protection of the small Bethel Schools to the city school system of Danbury. This was an absolute disaster! It was in Danbury that my son's IEP crumbled. He was labeled a

behavioral problem. He wasn't allowed to attend his 8th grade graduation because he wouldn't progress to H.S. until he completed the mandatory summer school program. (The push through) He never had an award or anything positive to look forward to. He never received an A on anything no matter how hard he tried, He failed in school at nearly everything. This led to a failure in friendships because he was labeled. So, once in Danbury, he drifted towards the "troubled kids" I believe it was in his 8th grade year maybe 2015 when the state of CT recognized dyslexia "other specified". However, no one was yet trained to help in any way.

The real nightmare, enter Danbury High School 2016. My son was suspended 40 times for learning disabled related issues. I recall getting calls sometimes twice a day regarding my son. One day an advisor called to tell me they were going to give my son a suspension this time for skipping class. He found my son outside in the courtyard in a cold winter rain with no coat, soaking wet, skipping class. He was alone. He didn't leave school property, my son was avoiding a class where a teacher on a daily basis shamed him. I had had enough! I exercised our legal rights, my son was tested by a neuropsychologist that the public school recommended and was indeed found to have dyslexia, dyscalculia and was growing out of dysgraphia.

Let me share with you the ultimate damage of not having trained professionals to help a student with dyslexia.

*My son was now in the tenth grade and his educational functioning level was that of a third grader. A THIRD grader trying to participate in High School! Imagine if that was you? Danbury Public Schools tried to put him in their alternative schools for children who misbehaved or had criminal problems. My son did not belong in those places.

The legal gag put on a parent is unfair. I believe because my son has now graduated from the CT public schools that I am no longer legally bound to keep things quiet. I think it's safe to share that as a result of many things not mentioned here, my son was awarded compensatory education. He completed his last 2 ½ years at an alternative school that helped him with life skills. He was never taught an alternative approach to learning the world with dyslexia. I was told he already created his own coping skills. It was too late. I am extremely saddened by this. My son has dyslexia for life! So, how would he carry an assistive device on his job? How does he "cognitively catch up" with what his boss is telling him? He works a manual labor job and at times struggles with supervisory instruction. He was never taught adaptive skills, or alternative learning approaches so he will struggle the rest of his life! He dreams of going to college and to learn automotive engineering. He is very bright and with the right instruction he will soar! Sadly, in his own mind he wonders if he can do it. That right there is self defeating.

In the early 90s the Cosby Show brought to light the struggle of young people with dyslexia when the son, Theo entered college but struggled to make grades. There he was diagnosed and introduced to alternative learning programs that allowed him to succeed despite his learning style difference. It's incredible that over 20 years later we are just now pressing House Bills for such issues. There is no logical argument against educating our teachers, aids and all involved with these gifted young people.

That's what it is really. A gif! It's just disguised in a different kind of packaging. I tell my son all the time he will be the most sought after employee or business owner or designer, because he thinks outside the box! He is creative, and once a person sees he is not a cookie cutter person and that he is a trailblazer he is sure to move mountains!

Thank you for your time.